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Evaluating the Effectiveness and Impact of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Policy in Enhancing Access to educational enrollment and Addressing Infrastructure Gaps in Akwa Ibom State.

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ABSTRACT: The Universal Basic Education (UBE) program in Akwa Ibom State has played a pivotal role in enhancing access to education, particularly in rural areas. However, several challenges have impeded its full potential. While the policy has successfully increased enrollment rates, the quality of education has remained a significant issue. Persistent infrastructure deficits, such as inadequate classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities, especially in underserved regions, have compounded the problem. Overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of qualified teachers further hinder the effective delivery of education. Additionally, despite efforts by the government to allocate funds to the UBE program, resource distribution has been unequal, with rural schools receiving fewer resources compared to urban ones. This disparity has resulted in a disconnect between the increase in enrollment and the quality of education provided. To achieve the study's objectives, documentary and descriptive research methods were employed, utilizing qualitative approaches to gather data from secondary sources. Data were collected from existing

documents, including reports, publications, books, academic articles, and archival materials to provide comprehensive insights. The study concluded that although the UBE policy has made notable progress in increasing educational access, it has not fully achieved its goal of providing universal and quality education. The lack of adequate infrastructure, qualified teachers, and the unequal distribution of resources between rural and urban areas have contributed to this challenge. The study recommended several measures to address these issues. First, increased government investment in education, with a focus on ensuring equitable resource distribution between rural and urban areas, is essential. Adequate funding should be allocated to infrastructure development, teacher recruitment, and provision of instructional materials. Additionally, targeted professional development programs should be implemented to recruit and train more qualified teachers, especially in rural areas. The study also recommended strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems and enhancing community involvement in addressing barriers to education. By implementing these recommendations, Akwa Ibom State can improve both access and the quality of education under the UBE policy.

Keywords: *Universal Basic Education (UBE), Access to education, Infrastructure gaps, educational quality, Enrollment rates, educational outcomes.*

INTRODUCTION

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, launched in 1999 by the Nigerian government, is a landmark initiative aimed at providing free, compulsory, and universal education to all children of school-going age across the country. The policy was conceived to tackle the entrenched challenges of educational access, equity, and quality, aiming to ensure that every child, regardless of socioeconomic background, has the opportunity to attain basic education. Akwa Ibom State, as a key participant in the implementation of the UBE policy, has made strides in improving educational access; however, significant challenges remain, particularly with regard to infrastructure and educational quality.

The focus of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the UBE policy in Akwa Ibom State, particularly in two key areas: enhancing access to basic

education for all children of school-going age and addressing the infrastructure gaps that continue to undermine the quality of education. While the UBE policy has succeeded in increasing school enrollment and ensuring education is free and compulsory, a range of challenges persist, including inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, limited access to teaching materials, and a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in rural areas (Umar, 2015). These issues have resulted in disparities in educational quality, impeding the realization of the policy's overarching goals of equity and quality education for all.

Infrastructure deficits are a critical barrier to the success of the UBE policy in Akwa Ibom State. Many schools in the state lack essential facilities such as classrooms, libraries, sanitation facilities, and laboratories, which are necessary for effective learning (Akpan, 2020). Furthermore, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching staff, and poor school conditions further exacerbate the challenge of providing quality education. These challenges are particularly prevalent in rural and underserved areas, where the delivery of education is often hampered by insufficient resources (Bassey, 2018). Despite government efforts to allocate funding for educational infrastructure, these gaps persist, limiting the effectiveness of the UBE policy in improving educational outcomes.

This study aims to assess the extent to which the UBE policy has been successful in overcoming these barriers and enhancing access to education in Akwa Ibom State. By evaluating the policy's impact on infrastructure, teacher recruitment and training, and overall educational quality, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the successes and shortcomings of the UBE policy in the state.

Research Design

The study will employ documentary and descriptive research methods, utilizing qualitative approaches to gather information from secondary sources. Data collection will involve a thorough review of existing documents, including reports, publications, books, academic articles, and relevant archival materials. These secondary sources will provide comprehensive insights into the topic, allowing for a detailed analysis of historical and contemporary perspectives. By relying on well-

documented materials, the study aims to ensure accuracy and depth in its exploration of the issue without the need for direct interviews or questionnaires.

Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework

Review of Conceptual Literature

Concept of Educational Policy

Educational policy is a broad and dynamic field that encompasses the various decisions, regulations, and strategies established by governments and organizations to govern the educational systems within a country or region. It plays a central role in shaping the structure, content, and outcomes of education, influencing everything from curriculum design to the allocation of resources and the overall goals of education. One of the key definitions of educational policy is that it is a tool for national development, used to align education systems with broader national goals. By setting educational priorities, policies aim to contribute to economic, social, and cultural development through improved education. According to the World Bank (2018), educational policy can be seen as an essential element of national development, integrating educational goals with the broader needs of society.

Another important definition of educational policy emphasizes its role in ensuring equity and social justice. McGinn and Harmon (2016) argue that educational policies are meant to reduce educational inequalities by ensuring that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, geographic location, or gender, have access to quality education. This goal is particularly vital in addressing disparities between urban and rural areas, and among marginalized groups, by promoting inclusive educational practices.

Educational policy also serves as a mechanism for reform and innovation. As societies and economies evolve, education systems must adapt, and educational policies are often the vehicles through which these changes are introduced. Ball (2012) highlights the role of policy in addressing emerging challenges, such as globalization and technological advancements, by creating reforms that enhance the quality of education and address the specific needs of different communities. This

continuous reform ensures that education systems remain relevant and effective in preparing students for the future.

Additionally, educational policy is often seen as a reflection of political ideologies and societal values. According to Apple (2004), educational policies are frequently shaped by the political agenda of the ruling government, which may promote specific ideologies, such as nationalism, gender equality, or economic priorities. These policies dictate not only the educational content, such as what is taught and how it is delivered, but also influence broader societal norms, including attitudes towards diversity, citizenship, and cultural identity.Educational policy also plays a central role in governance and accountability within the education system. It sets the standards for the functioning of schools, the recruitment and training of teachers, and the allocation of resources. Sahlberg (2011) discusses how policies help to establish mechanisms for monitoring and accountability, ensuring that educational institutions meet specific performance standards and that resources are used efficiently. In this sense, educational policy serves as both a guiding framework and a tool for evaluation and improvement.

Furthermore, educational policy can be understood as a response to societal challenges. As McGinn and Harmon (2016) assert, policies are often crafted in response to challenges such as high dropout rates, underachievement in certain subjects, or inadequate school infrastructure. Educational policy serves to address these issues through targeted interventions, which can include curriculum redesigns, teacher training, and increased investment in school facilities. Another important characteristic of educational policy is its role as a means of shaping future generations. Green (2013) highlights that educational policies play a significant role in shaping the skills, knowledge, and values that students acquire, thus influencing the development of human capital and preparing students to contribute to the economy and society. In this context, educational policy can be seen as a long-term investment in the future workforce.

Objectives and Goals of Educational Policy

The objectives and goals of educational policy are anchored in the vision of ensuring that education is accessible, equitable, and of high quality for all children, regardless

of their socio-economic status, geographic location, or background. Educational policies serve as frameworks that guide the development of relevant education systems capable of fostering the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values that are essential for individual and collective success. At the heart of these policies is the drive to prepare individuals for participation in a dynamic society and the labor market. In many countries, including Nigeria, the educational policy is shaped by the desire to create an education system that not only provides academic knowledge but also equips learners with the practical skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (NPE) sets out several key objectives aimed at ensuring the provision of free, compulsory, and universal education at both the primary and junior secondary levels. This policy also promotes lifelong learning and aims to enhance the quality of education through curriculum development and teacher training (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). These objectives are in line with broader goals of national development, as education is viewed as a critical tool for preparing individuals to engage fully in economic and social activities. The ultimate aim is to produce an educated populace capable of contributing to economic development, reducing poverty, and promoting social cohesion. The World Bank (2020) emphasizes that for educational policies to be effective, they must focus on developing human capital. This involves not just academic education, but also the vocational skills necessary for employment, ensuring that individuals are prepared to meet the demands of the job market.

One of the core goals of educational policy is to promote social equity by addressing disparities in access to education. In many countries, educational inequality persists along the lines of gender, socio-economic status, and geographic location. Policies are increasingly being designed to reduce these disparities and ensure that education is inclusive and accessible to all. According to UNICEF (2022), policies that prioritize marginalized groups—such as girls, children with disabilities, and those living in rural or remote areas—are essential to achieving social equity. In Nigeria, educational policies have increasingly targeted these groups, aiming to provide them with the necessary resources, infrastructure, and support to access quality education.

This focus on inclusivity is vital for breaking the cycle of poverty and ensuring that all children, irrespective of their background, have equal opportunities to succeed in life (UNESCO, 2021).

Furthermore, educational policies are aligned with global development targets, particularly those outlined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, SDG 4 calls for inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all, with a focus on ensuring that education systems provide equal access to education at all levels. This goal also emphasizes increasing the number of youth and adults who acquire the skills necessary for employment, lifelong learning, and active participation in society (United Nations, 2020). Educational policies worldwide must, therefore, align with these global commitments, while also addressing local challenges and needs. By doing so, they contribute not only to national development but also to global efforts aimed at reducing poverty, promoting peace, and building sustainable societies. As noted by the United Nations (2020), education is central to achieving the SDGs, as it serves as both an enabler and a driver of development in all sectors of society.

Key Stakeholders in Educational Policy Development

The development of educational policy is a collaborative process involving various stakeholders, each contributing to the creation, implementation, and evaluation of educational strategies. Key players in this process include government bodies, educational institutions, teachers, parents, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), all of whom work together to shape policies that align with national development goals and meet the diverse needs of the population. At the national level, the Ministry of Education and its affiliated agencies, such as the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), play a central role in formulating and implementing educational policies. UBEC, in particular, is responsible for overseeing the execution of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy, which provides free, compulsory education for all children in Nigeria. According to Nwadiani (2021), UBEC ensures that education policies are implemented at all levels, from primary education to tertiary institutions, and that they align with national development goals. These agencies not only allocate financial resources but

also monitor progress to ensure that the objectives of educational reforms are met. The Ministry of Education, alongside these agencies, advocates for policy regulation and coordination to maintain consistency in the education system.

Teachers' unions and professional organizations are also vital stakeholders in the educational policy process. These groups advocate for the rights and needs of educators, ensuring that their voices are heard in policymaking. They emphasize the importance of addressing concerns related to salaries, professional development, and working conditions. As Nwadiani (2021) points out, teachers' unions in Nigeria have been instrumental in advocating for educational reforms and improvements in teacher welfare. These unions work to influence governmental decisions to ensure that policies support the professional growth of educators, ultimately enhancing the quality of teaching.

Educational institutions, such as schools and universities, are where policies are implemented and where the direct impact of those policies is felt by students and teachers. Schools play a critical role as the front-line implementers of educational strategies, translating policies into everyday practices. According to Ogunyemi (2019), schools must be supported with adequate resources and trained personnel to effectively implement educational policies. This includes investing in infrastructure, learning materials, and ongoing teacher professional development to improve the quality of education.

Parents and local communities also play an essential role in the success of educational policies. Their involvement in school activities and governance ensures that policies reflect the needs of the children and families they serve. As UNICEF (2022) emphasizes, community engagement is crucial, particularly in rural and underserved areas, where parental involvement can contribute significantly to improving educational outcomes. Community-based organizations often collaborate with educational authorities to address specific challenges, such as school dropouts, child labor, and access to education for marginalized groups.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international bodies like UNICEF and UNESCO also play significant roles in shaping and supporting educational policy.

These organizations provide technical assistance, funding, and advocacy to improve education systems, particularly in developing countries. UNICEF (2022) highlights the contributions of NGOs in promoting inclusivity, gender equality, and access to education for disadvantaged populations. These organizations work with governments to implement education programs that address local needs, such as providing educational resources, building schools in remote areas, and advocating for policy reforms. International bodies like UNESCO provide frameworks for policy development, guiding national governments in aligning their strategies with global best practices and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

Importance of Educational Policy in National Development

Educational policy plays a crucial role in shaping the educational landscape of any nation by ensuring that the education system aligns with broader national development goals, ultimately promoting the well-being of individuals and society. Education is recognized as a fundamental human right, serving as the foundation for achieving other rights and empowering individuals to engage fully in society. According to UNESCO (2021), education is not just a tool for individual development but is also a critical driver of economic growth, social cohesion, and democratic participation. By ensuring access to education for all, regardless of socio-economic background, educational policy helps governments provide opportunities that foster both individual and collective progress.

In addition to promoting individual development, educational policy can significantly contribute to poverty reduction. The OECD (2020) highlights that access to quality education can reduce poverty by equipping individuals with the skills needed for employment, income generation, and economic stability. Education-focused policies are vital in breaking the cycle of poverty, particularly for disadvantaged communities. Furthermore, such policies enhance social equity by addressing disparities in access, especially for marginalized groups, including girls, children with disabilities, and those from rural or conflict-affected areas. By ensuring equal access to education, these policies promote a more equitable society (OECD, 2020).

Educational policies are also instrumental in developing a skilled, adaptable workforce that can drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and productivity. The World Bank (2020) underscores the economic benefits of investing in education, noting that a well-educated workforce is essential for economic advancement, as it enhances labor market skills, fosters innovation, and increases productivity. Additionally, quality education supports entrepreneurship by providing individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to create and sustain businesses. In developing nations, improving education is often seen as a cornerstone of sustained economic growth, increasing both employability and global competitiveness (World Bank, 2020).

Furthermore, educational policy plays a vital role in promoting social cohesion. It fosters values such as tolerance, respect for diversity, and community engagement, which are essential for building cohesive and resilient societies. According to UNICEF (2022), education helps build social capital by encouraging understanding among individuals from diverse backgrounds, strengthening societal bonds, and promoting peaceful coexistence. Education also empowers citizens to engage in democratic processes, make informed decisions, and contribute to governance. Through education, individuals learn the importance of human rights, the rule of law, and active participation in democracy critical elements for building strong, democratic societies (UNICEF, 2022).

Finally, a well-designed educational policy is essential for achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which focuses on ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. The United Nations (2020) emphasizes that education is central to the SDGs, enabling progress in areas like poverty reduction, health, and economic growth. Educational policies that prioritize quality, inclusivity, and accessibility are crucial for meeting SDG 4. These policies must address barriers such as gender, disability, and geographic location to ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to reach their full potential (United Nations, 2020).

Concept of Universal Basic Education

Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a comprehensive educational policy initiative that aims to provide free, compulsory, and accessible primary and junior secondary education for all children in Nigeria. This initiative was officially introduced in 1999 with the goal of ensuring that every child, regardless of gender, socio-economic background, or geographic location, has the opportunity to receive a basic education. UBE is considered a critical policy in Nigeria's effort to achieve sustainable human development and to reduce the high rates of illiteracy, particularly in rural and marginalized communities (Federal Ministry of Education, 1999). The policy not only focuses on increasing enrollment rates but also strives to enhance the quality of education by improving infrastructure, teaching materials, and teacher training.

In the context of Nigeria, the UBE program was designed as an inclusive approach to address disparities in educational access. It seeks to make education universally accessible by eliminating financial and social barriers that traditionally hindered enrollment, especially for disadvantaged groups such as girls, children from rural areas, and those with disabilities (Olatunbosun, 2000). Furthermore, UBE is aligned with global educational goals, particularly the Education for All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all children (UNICEF, 2018). This policy is thus integral to national development strategies, as it focuses on building human capital that is essential for the country's economic and social progress (Obanya, 2005).

The UBE program is also seen as a tool for social integration, as it promotes national unity by providing all children with similar educational opportunities, fostering shared values, and reducing socio-economic disparities (Gbadegesin, 2006). However, while the policy has had notable successes in increasing enrollment, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and teacher shortages continue to hinder its effectiveness in many parts of Nigeria, particularly in rural and underserved areas. These obstacles underscore the need for continued government investment and stronger implementation mechanisms to ensure that the goals of UBE are fully realized. Nevertheless, UBE remains a critical policy for

Nigeria's long-term development, aiming not only to educate children but also to equip them with the skills needed to contribute meaningfully to society and the economy (McGinn & Harmon, 2016).

Key Principles and Objectives of Universal Basic Education (UBE)

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy in Nigeria, introduced in 1999, is centered around several key principles aimed at transforming the education system to ensure free, compulsory, and equitable access to education for all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, gender, or geographical location. One of the core principles of the UBE policy is **equity,** ensuring that every child, including those from marginalized groups like girls, children with disabilities, and those from rural areas, has the same opportunity to receive an education. This principle aligns with the global call for inclusive education, as outlined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, 2020), which emphasizes the importance of providing inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all children (UNICEF, 2022).

Another foundational principle of the UBE policy is **compulsory education,** which mandates that children between the ages of 6 and 15 must attend school. This is crucial in addressing high dropout rates and ensuring that every child receives at least nine years of basic education. By making education mandatory, the policy aims to eliminate educational exclusion and reduce illiteracy rates, ultimately fostering a more educated populace capable of contributing to national development (World Bank, 2020).

In addition, the provision of **free education** is another central tenet of the UBE policy. The Nigerian government recognizes that financial barriers, especially in poverty-stricken areas, can significantly hinder children's access to education. By removing these financial barriers, including providing free textbooks, learning materials, and infrastructure, the policy ensures that children from all economic backgrounds can attend school without the burden of educational costs. This is particularly important for rural families, where costs like transportation and uniforms can be prohibitive (UBEC, 2020).

The promotion of **quality education** is also one of the UBE policy's main objectives. While access to education is important, the quality of the education provided is equally essential for achieving positive educational outcomes. The policy aims to improve the quality of education by focusing on curriculum development, teacher training, and the provision of adequate educational materials and infrastructure. By ensuring that students acquire not only basic literacy and numeracy skills but also prepare for lifelong learning and future employment, the UBE policy contributes to building a skilled workforce that can support the socio-economic development of Nigeria (Nwadiani, 2021; World Bank, 2020).

Additionally, the UBE policy aims to address **educational disparities** across Nigeria. The policy provides targeted interventions to reduce the gaps in access to education and quality between different regions, especially between urban and rural areas. By constructing new schools, improving existing infrastructure, and increasing the number of teachers in underserved regions, the UBE policy seeks to ensure that children in rural areas receive the same educational opportunities as their counterparts in urban areas, promoting social equity and inclusion (UBEC, 2020).

The **empowerment of marginalized groups** is also a significant objective of the UBE policy. The policy has a particular focus on providing educational opportunities for vulnerable groups such as girls, children with disabilities, and other marginalized communities. Although there has been progress in increasing the enrollment of girls, challenges like early marriage, gender-based violence, and cultural barriers still hinder their full participation in education. The UBE policy seeks to reduce these barriers and create an inclusive education system that meets the needs of all children, regardless of gender, disability, or socio-cultural factors (Ogunyemi, 2019).

Finally, the UBE policy aims to contribute to **national development** by preparing individuals to fully engage in the economy and society. The policy emphasizes education’s role in fostering national unity, economic growth, and political stability. The UBE policy seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to contribute to the nation's development. This includes not only academic skills but also vocational and life skills that are essential for success in a rapidly changing world. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, poor

infrastructure, and teacher shortages continue to hinder the full realization of these objectives. Continued investment in education and further reforms to the education system are crucial to ensuring that the UBE policy achieves its goals (Ogunyemi, 2019).

Review of Empirical Literature

Oyelade and Abolade (2018) provided a historical analysis of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program in Nigeria, highlighting the significant contributions it made towards mass enlightenment and equipping children with pre-vocational skills since its introduction in 1999. However, the study also revealed several challenges, including insufficient government funding, which led to a lack of adequate human and material resources, ultimately compromising the quality of education. The authors recommended increased governmental commitment to financing the UBE program and suggested extending it to cover senior secondary education to fully realize its benefits and objectives.

Akpan (2018) critically evaluated both the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Basic Education (UBE) policies, focusing on their objectives and the challenges faced during their implementation. The study emphasized that effective implementation of these policies could contribute significantly to building a sustainable framework for providing basic education to all. It also stressed the need for the full participation and cooperation of the public, educational professionals, and the government to ensure successful management and realization of the UBE policy.

Obun, Joseph, and Akan (2018) conducted a qualitative study assessing the strategies used in implementing the UBE policy, offering critical insights into its effectiveness. The study highlighted significant setbacks during the implementation phase, revealing that while the UBE policy was well-formulated, several challenges hindered its execution. The researchers recommended that ongoing efforts by the government and stakeholders should prioritize equity, trust, reliability, and rationality to address these implementation challenges and improve the quality of education in Nigeria.

Onojete (2018) explored the historical context of free universal primary education initiatives in Nigeria, particularly the UBE Scheme, and found that despite facing challenges like inadequate funding and political commitment, the UBE scheme had transformative potential. The study concluded that the program could significantly contribute to nation-building by improving literacy rates and access to education. Onojete recommended that future educational reforms should focus on rigorous planning, community engagement, and government accountability to overcome past shortcomings and realize the full potential of free education.

Ogbonnia (2020) emphasized the importance of education as a vital pathway for realizing human rights and fostering national development. His study highlighted key obstacles facing the UBE program, such as inadequate funding, poor planning, and corruption. These challenges hindered the effective implementation of the UBE program and its contribution to national development. Ogbonnia recommended addressing these issues to ensure the program's efficiency and success, ultimately contributing to the country's economic and social progress.

Ubong and Mosses (2020) assessed the impact of free and compulsory education on Akwa Ibom State's development from 1997 to 2018. Their study found a significant increase in both enrollment and completion rates, particularly at the secondary school level. While the primary school level showed minimal improvement, the study concluded that the provision of free education had led to improvements in accessibility. However, it also highlighted the importance of adequate resources and support systems to maximize the program's effectiveness. The researchers recommended that the state government focus on further developing educational infrastructure, improving teacher training, and ensuring the continued provision of necessary resources to maintain and enhance enrollment and completion rates.

The UBE Policy and Universal Access to Basic Education for all Children of School-going age in Nigeria: An Assessment

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy, introduced in Nigeria in 1999, was designed to provide free, compulsory, and universal education for all children aged 6 to 15 years, aiming to ensure equitable access to education regardless of socio-

economic status, gender, or geographical location. The policy was a response to the country's low literacy rates, poor educational infrastructure, and the exclusion of marginalized groups from formal education. Over the years, the UBE policy has led to increased enrollment figures and greater awareness of the importance of education, but the effectiveness of the policy in achieving universal access remains a complex issue.

While the UBE policy has made significant strides in increasing enrollment, barriers to access persist. Research has shown that while more children are attending school, particularly in rural and underserved areas, many still face challenges that hinder their full participation in education. Studies by Ogunniran (2017) indicate that overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of qualified teachers, and inadequate teaching materials continue to plague the education system. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) has reported that although enrollment rates have increased, many children still drop out before completing the full nine years of basic education due to factors such as a lack of infrastructure, poorly trained teachers, and the persistence of socio-economic barriers despite the policy’s free education mandate. Additionally, many rural areas remain underserved, with schools lacking essential facilities and resources to provide quality education.

Infrastructure plays a key role in the quality of education, and while the UBE policy has made provisions to improve infrastructure, challenges remain. A report by Adesina (2020) points out that many schools, particularly in rural areas, operate with inadequate facilities such as classrooms, desks, proper sanitation, and safe drinking water. These deficiencies significantly hinder students' ability to learn effectively. Moreover, the lack of teaching materials such as textbooks, computers, and other learning aids remains a major problem in schools across Nigeria. Research by Asuk (2023) emphasized that the availability of infrastructure correlates directly with student performance. However, despite efforts to address these gaps, implementation has been uneven across the country. Urban areas have seen more progress in infrastructure development, but rural areas continue to suffer from poor conditions, further exacerbating educational inequalities.

Another critical goal of the UBE policy is to reduce illiteracy and equip students with essential skills in literacy, numeracy, and life skills. While the policy has led to an increase in the number of children attending school, the quality of education and the acquisition of basic skills remain uneven. According to the National Assessment of Learning Achievement in Basic Education (NALABE) conducted by UBEC, literacy rates have improved, but many students continue to struggle with foundational skills, which are essential for their academic and personal development. A study by Nwadiani (2021) revealed that a significant number of children complete primary education without mastering basic literacy and numeracy skills, which hinders their ability to progress in their education or contribute meaningfully to society. Furthermore, insecurity and violence in certain regions of Nigeria, particularly in the Northeast, have disrupted education and made it difficult for children in conflict-affected areas to access schooling. This has further undermined efforts to reduce illiteracy and improve the quality of education under the UBE policy.The UBE policy also aims to be inclusive by addressing educational disparities, particularly for marginalized groups such as girls, children with disabilities, and those in rural areas. Despite the policy's focus on inclusivity, significant gaps remain. Research by Okeke (2022) highlighted that cultural norms and societal attitudes continue to prevent many girls, especially in northern Nigeria, from accessing education. In many rural areas, girls are kept at home due to early marriages, domestic responsibilities, and cultural beliefs that limit their educational opportunities. Children with disabilities face similar barriers, as many schools lack the necessary infrastructure, resources, and trained teachers to cater to their specific needs. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (2023) noted that, while there have been efforts to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools, they remain largely excluded due to the lack of adequate provisions. Additionally, children in rural and underserved areas continue to face disparities in access to quality education, as schools in these regions often lack the basic facilities and resources needed for effective learning.

While the UBE policy has made notable progress in increasing access to education in Nigeria, several challenges remain in achieving its objectives. The policy has contributed to higher enrollment rates, but issues such as overcrowded classrooms,

inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching materials, and teacher shortages continue to undermine the effectiveness of the policy.

2.6.2 The UBE policy and the improvement of quality of education through infrastructural projects. An Overview

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy aimed not only at providing free and compulsory education but also at addressing several challenges related to educational infrastructure, instructional materials, and teacher quality. This multifaceted approach sought to create an enabling environment for effective teaching and learning, which is crucial for achieving sustainable educational outcomes.

One of the key areas where the UBE policy sought to make improvements was in addressing the deficits in educational infrastructure. Prior to the implementation of the UBE policy, many schools in Nigeria, especially in rural and underserved regions, were plagued by poor infrastructure. This included dilapidated buildings, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of essential facilities like toilets and electricity. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2019), inadequate infrastructure was a significant barrier to quality education, as it negatively impacted the learning environment and the overall educational experience.

The UBE policy, through the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), allocated funds to build and rehabilitate classrooms, construct toilets, and provide other essential amenities such as water supply and electricity in schools. This initiative was aimed at creating a more conducive environment for learning and improving the overall educational experience. For instance, in several states, schools received new buildings, and some existing ones were refurbished to accommodate the increasing number of students under the UBE policy. However, despite these efforts, there are still significant disparities in infrastructure across different regions. While urban areas have benefitted from these improvements, many rural areas continue to suffer from inadequate school infrastructure, which hampers the effectiveness of education (Fagbemi& Afolabi, 2015). This indicates that, while the UBE policy has made strides in infrastructure development, more investment is needed, particularly in underserved and remote areas.

Another area where the UBE policy has made an impact is in the provision of instructional materials. Quality education is heavily dependent on the availability of teaching and learning materials, including textbooks, writing materials, and teaching aids. Prior to the implementation of the UBE policy, there was a significant shortage of instructional materials, which hindered effective teaching and learning. The UBE policy sought to address this by providing free textbooks and other learning materials to schools, especially those in rural and economically disadvantaged areas.

According to Okebukola (2006), the provision of textbooks and other learning materials was one of the key pillars of the UBE policy. The government worked with educational authorities at the federal, state, and local levels to distribute textbooks in core subjects such as English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. This initiative was aimed at ensuring that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, had access to the resources they needed to succeed in their studies. However, despite these efforts, challenges remain in the equitable distribution of these materials, particularly in remote areas where schools often face logistical challenges in receiving and distributing these resources. Additionally, the quality of textbooks and other instructional materials has been questioned, with concerns over outdated content and misalignment with modern educational standards (Ogunyemi, 2017).

A critical component of the UBE policy has been the recruitment and training of qualified teachers. Teachers are central to the delivery of quality education, and the UBE policy recognized that improving teacher quality was essential to achieving its objectives. The UBE policy aimed to recruit, train, and retain qualified teachers to ensure effective teaching and learning at the primary and junior secondary levels.

The policy established initiatives such as the Teacher Education and Professional Development Program, which sought to improve the qualifications and professional development of teachers through in-service training, workshops, and certification programs. The National Teachers' Institute (NTI) also played a role in providing training for teachers in both rural and urban areas, aiming to equip them with the necessary skills to teach effectively. Despite these efforts, the issue of teacher quality remains a challenge. According to a study by Fagbemi and Afolabi (2015), many

schools, particularly in rural areas, continue to face shortages of qualified teachers, with many teachers lacking the requisite qualifications or experience to teach specific subjects. In some cases, teachers with inadequate training have been assigned to teach subjects they are not qualified in, which affects the overall quality of education.

In addition to the shortage of qualified teachers, the teacher-to-student ratio remains a major concern. Overcrowded classrooms, particularly in urban areas, further exacerbate the challenges of delivering quality education. The UBE policy has helped to increase teacher recruitment, but there is still a need for more teachers to meet the growing demand for basic education (Okebukola, 2014). Furthermore, the professional development of teachers is an ongoing process, and there remains a need for continuous training and support to improve the teaching profession in Nigeria.

Challenges of Effective Implementation of UBE Policy in Akwa Ibom State

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy in Nigeria has made significant strides in improving access to education, although challenges remain, especially in rural and underserved areas. Key barriers include the unequal distribution of educational resources, particularly in rural areas where inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and a shortage of teaching staff hinder effective learning (Adebayo & Amuwo, 2015; Ogunyemi, 2017). These challenges make it difficult for the UBE policy to achieve its goal of universal education, particularly in remote regions. Gender inequality is another major challenge, especially in northern Nigeria, where cultural practices and socio-economic factors hinder girls' access to education (UNESCO, 2016). Early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and cultural norms restrict educational opportunities for girls, with poverty further exacerbating the issue by leading families to prioritize boys' education (Oyeniran & Anikwe, 2016).

In addition to access challenges, the quality of education under the UBE policy remains insufficient. Overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of qualified teachers, and inadequate learning materials are ongoing issues (Okebukola, 2014). Teacher shortages in critical subjects, such as science and mathematics, and limited professional development opportunities have worsened the quality gap. Okebukola (2006) emphasized that modern teaching methods are underutilized due to

inadequate training for educators. The effectiveness of the UBE policy is further hindered by weak monitoring and evaluation systems. Fagbemi and Afolabi (2015) noted that irregular inspections and poor data management have prevented effective progress tracking and accountability. Corruption and mismanagement at the state and local levels have delayed the program's implementation, particularly in regions most in need.

Poverty remains a significant socio-economic barrier to education despite the provision of free schooling under the UBE policy. Hidden costs like transportation, uniforms, and other school-related expenses prevent families from enrolling or ensuring regular attendance for their children, particularly in rural areas (Offiong et al., 2020). While the UBE policy has led to increased enrollment rates and improvements in literacy, continued efforts are needed to address issues related to resource allocation, gender disparities, and educational quality (National Population Commission, 2018). To fully realize the UBE policy's objectives, the challenges of infrastructure deficits, teacher shortages, and the high dropout rates must be addressed. The Human Capital Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the importance of education in individual and societal development, emphasizing that education serves as an investment in human capital, driving productivity, economic advancement, and social progress (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964). In Akwa Ibom State, the application of this theory highlights the need for sustained investments in education to address gaps in infrastructure, teacher training, and the availability of learning materials (Udoh, 2021). These insights underscore the importance of addressing these systemic barriers to ensure the UBE policy's success in providing equitable access to quality education and contributing to national development. The effective implementation of UBE requires continued government commitment, proper funding, and a focus on overcoming educational inequalities, particularly in underserved communities.

Study Findings

The study found that while the UBE policy has significantly increased access to education, especially in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State, it has faced several challenges that hinder its full impact. Enrollment rates have increased, but the quality

of education remains uneven due to infrastructure deficits and a shortage of qualified teachers. Many schools, especially in underserved areas, lack basic facilities such as proper classrooms, libraries, and sanitation. Furthermore, overcrowded classrooms and insufficient teaching materials continue to impede effective learning. The study also found that while the government has made efforts to provide funding and support, the allocation remains inadequate, and resource distribution is often inequitable, with rural schools receiving fewer resources compared to urban counterparts. These factors have led to a disconnect between enrollment figures and educational quality, with many students completing primary education without mastering foundational skills like literacy and numeracy.

Conclusion

The UBE policy in Akwa Ibom State has made commendable progress in increasing enrollment and promoting universal access to education. However, achieving the policy's ultimate goal of providing quality education for all remains a significant challenge. Infrastructure deficits, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching materials, and a shortage of qualified teachers continue to undermine the policy's effectiveness. These challenges, coupled with insufficient government funding and inadequate resource allocation, have resulted in uneven educational outcomes, particularly in rural areas. While there have been improvements in enrollment rates, the lack of focus on quality education poses a barrier to long-term educational development and national progress.

Recommendations

i. **Increased Government Investment**: The government should allocate more funds to the UBE program, ensuring that resources are equitably distributed across rural and urban areas. A dedicated budget for infrastructure development, teacher training, and the provision of educational materials should be prioritized to bridge existing gaps.

ii. **Improved Teacher Training and Recruitment**: Efforts should be made to recruit more qualified teachers, particularly in underserved and rural areas. A comprehensive professional development program for teachers should be

implemented to improve teaching quality and ensure that educators are equipped with modern teaching skills.

iii. **Infrastructure Development**: The government should focus on improving the infrastructure of schools, especially in rural areas. Building and refurbishing classrooms, providing essential utilities like water and electricity, and ensuring proper sanitation facilities will create an environment conducive to learning.

iv. **Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation Systems**: To ensure that the UBE policy is effectively implemented, a robust monitoring and evaluation system should be established. This system should track progress, identify challenges, and provide timely feedback to policymakers, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and the policy's objectives are met.

v. **Community Engagement**: Parents, local communities, and non-governmental organizations should be actively involved in the implementation of the UBE policy. Their participation will ensure that policies are tailored to the specific needs of the local population and help address barriers to school attendance, such as socio-economic factors and gender inequality.

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